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SEX REFASHIONED

BIOPOLITICS BAUDRILLARD, FASHION, MANNEQUIN, SEX, SIGN

...fashion has the fabulous character of the more beautiful than beautiful: fascinating. The seduction it exerts is independent of all value judgment...

The astonishing privilege accorded to fashion is due to a unanimous and definitive resolve. The acceleration of the simple play of signifiers in fashion becomes striking, to the point of enchanting us – the enchantment and vertigo of the loss of every system of reference. **In this sense, it is the completed form of political economy, the cycle wherein the linearity of the**

commodity comes to be abolished. There is no longer any determinacy internal to the signs of fashion, hence they become free to commute and permutate without limit. At the term of this unprecedented enfranchisement, they obey, as if logically, a mad and meticulous recurrence. This applies to fashion as regards clothes, the body and objects – the sphere of ‘light’ signs. In the sphere of ‘heavy’ signs – politics, morals, economics, science, culture, sexuality – the principle of commutation nowhere plays with the same abandon ...

Today, every principle of identity is affected by fashion, precisely because of its potential to revert all forms to non-origin and recurrence. Fashion is always *rétro*, but always on the basis of the abolition of the *passé* (the past): the spectral death and resurrection of forms. Its proper actuality (its ‘up-to-dateness’, its ‘relevance’) is not a reference to the present, but an immediate and total recycling. Paradoxically, fashion is the inactual (the ‘out-of-date’, the ‘irrelevant’). It always presupposes a dead time of forms, a kind of abstraction whereby they become, as if safe from time ...

Fashion does the same thing in accordance with its cycle: it commutes all signs and causes an absolute play amongst them ...

This new reality of the body as hidden sex is from the outset merged with woman’s body. The concealed body is feminine (not biologically of course; rather mythologically). The conjunction of fashion and woman, since the bourgeois, puritan era, reveals therefore a double indexation: that of fashion on a hidden body, that of woman on a repressed sex. This conjunction did not exist (or not so much) until the eighteenth century (and not at all, of course, in ceremonial societies) – and for us today it is beginning to disappear. As for us, when the destiny of a hidden sex and the forbidden truth of the body arises, when fashion itself neutralises the opposition between the body and dress, then the affinity of woman and fashion progressively diminishes⁶ – fashion is generalised and becomes less and less the exclusive property of one sex or of one age. Be wary, for it is a matter neither of progress nor of liberation. The same logic still applies, and if fashion is generalised and leaves the privileged medium of woman so as to be open to all, the prohibition placed on the body is also generalised in a more subtle form than puritan repression: in the form of general desexualisation. For it was only under repression that the body had strong sexual potential: it then appeared as a captivating demand. Abandoned to the signs of fashion, the body is sexually disenchanted, it becomes a mannequin, a term whose lack of sexual discrimination suits its meaning well.⁷ The mannequin a term whose lack of sexual discrimination suits its meaning well.⁷ The mannequin is sex in its entirety, but sex without qualities. Fashion is its sex. Or rather, it is in fashion that sex is lost as difference but is generalised as reference (as simulation). Nothing is sexed any longer, everything is sexualised. The masculine and the feminine themselves rediscover, having once lost their particularity, the chance of an unlimited second existence. Sex is lost as difference but is generalised as reference (as simulation). Nothing is sexed any longer, everything is sexualised. The masculine and the feminine themselves rediscover, having once lost their particularity, the chance of an unlimited second existence. Hence, in our culture alone, sexuality impregnates all signification, and this is because signs have, for their part, invested the entire sexual sphere., in our culture alone, sexuality impregnates

all signification, and this is because signs have, for their part, invested the entire sexual sphere. In this way the current paradox becomes clear: we simultaneously witness the 'emancipation' of woman and a fresh upsurge of fashion. This is because fashion has only to do with the feminine, and not with women. Society in its entirety is becoming feminine to the extent that discrimination against women is coming to an end (as it is for madmen, children, etc.,)

... and a familiar French expression of the female orgasm [jouissance], has now become generalised, while simultaneously, of course, destabilising its signification. We must also note however, that woman can only be 'liberated' and 'emancipated' as 'force of pleasure' and 'force of fashion', exactly as the proletariat is only ever liberated as the 'labour force'. The above illusion is radical. The historical definition of the feminine is formed on the basis of the destiny of the body and sex bound up with fashion. The historical liberation of the feminine can only be the realisation of this destiny writ large (which immediately becomes the liberation of the whole world, without however losing its discriminatory character). At the same moment that woman accesses a universal labour modelled on the proletariat, the whole world also accesses the emancipation of sex and fashion, modelled on woman.

We can immediately, and clearly, see that fashion is a labour, to which it becomes necessary to accord equal historical importance to 'material' labour. It is also of capital importance (which by the same token becomes part of capital!) to produce commodities in accordance with the market, and to produce the body in accordance with the rules of sex and fashion. The division of labour won't settle where we think, or rather there is no division of labour at all: the production of the body, the production of death, the production of signs and the production of commodities.

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